

TESTIMONY OF NAFISAGUL SHERNAZAR

I came to New Haven Legal Assistance because of problems that I was having with my husband and his family. When our daughter was only 9 months old, he left us and moved to London with his second wife. He did not divorce me, so he had two wives. When he left, his parents forced my daughter and I to keep living with them, which is the custom in our culture. My in-laws treated us very badly. We had to sleep on the floor and had no heat in our room. I was treated like a servant and they took my paychecks. They made my daughter clean the house and did not let her do her homework. My in-laws beat me if I complained or if I used the gas to cook or took food from the refrigerator.

After my brother-in-law beat me very badly last mother's day, we finally moved out but we were still not safe. In June, my brother-in-law took my daughter away from me. Fortunately, some friends from my church convinced him to give her back to me. In July, my husband came back to the United States and tried to take my daughter from me. My in-laws told him to do it. I did not know it, but back in 2003, my mother-in-law went to Probate Court and asked to be made my daughter's legal guardian. She lied, saying my husband and I were dead, and the court believed her and gave her guardianship. Once she was guardian, my in-laws were able to get money from the State for my daughter. I never knew why my mother-in-law asked me for receipts for clothing I bought for my daughter until my sister-in-law finally told me. My mother-in-law was collecting the receipts to trick the court into thinking that she was spending the money on my daughter.

I told my lawyer, Sheila Hayre, that I was afraid of them and most of all afraid they would take my daughter away from me. They would not even give her birth certificate to me. We went to court and now I have legal custody of my daughter. The court told him to pay child support and we will be divorced soon. My daughter and I have a new life now. If it were not for my lawyer, Sheila Hayre, from New Haven Legal Assistance, I would not have known that there was anything I could do or that I had any rights. My daughter and I can now live in safety. Thank you for making sure there is a legal aid where people like me can go for help.